

# Advertising Case Study GSD&M Idea City

File transfer problems.  
**Solved.**



## Leading creative firm accelerates collaborative processes using the Accellion Virtual Appliance to share and deliver visionary ideas.

### Background

The creative firm GSD&M Idea City was founded in 1971 by six University of Texas graduates. Today, the advertising agency is known for growing clients' businesses and contributing to communities around the world. Idea City is part of the Omnicom Group, a strategic holding company for global market leaders in advertising, marketing services, specialty communications, interactive/digital media and media buying services.

The unique working environment of Idea City is designed to maximize creativity and stimulate the small working groups that generate big ideas. The agency works on the principle of Dynamic Collaboration, which is born out of the fundamental beliefs that "no one has the corner on the smarts" and "we're all better together."

The leaders of Idea City explain their way of working with this simple philosophy: "We believe that the more we tear down silos and work collaboratively – with each other, with our vendor-partners, with our clients, with other Omnicom partners and with best-in-class experts from around the world – the more likely we are to deliver visionary ideas that will make a difference."

In its constant collaboration with customers, media outlets and other groups, Idea City has a very big need to send and receive large files containing proprietary creative works. Workers are exchanging a lot of digital media such as video and audio, and these large files just can't be sent via email. Typical file sizes can reach the 200 MB to 500 MB range, but it's not unusual for some files to reach the 6 GB to 8 GB mark. Finding an efficient and cost effective means to securely send these creative materials was a business imperative for Idea City and its process of Dynamic Collaboration.

### Challenges

For years, the company relied on a home grown solution for large file transfer. According to Dallas LaRose, Enterprise Systems Supervisor for Idea City, "We have an internal application development group. They developed a web-based application that enabled us to exchange files with our colleagues."

This internal application had its shortcomings. It was prone to failure and employees didn't trust it. "We found that people were turning to a courier service to send critical files, often because they didn't believe our application was capable of reliably delivering them," says LaRose. "We were starting to see increased charges for overnight shipping services."

In addition, the in-house developed application required frequent code changes and manual maintenance. As the cost of supporting this application increased, the IT department began looking for a commercial file transfer solution. LaRose led the effort to find and evaluate potential solutions and to make the final recommendation to the company's Chief Technology Officer, Jerry Rios.

**"When we installed the Accellion solution to evaluate it, this product quickly became the benchmark for how a secure file transfer product should work. The virtual appliance is easy to deploy, and we had it running in just a few hours."**

Dallas LaRose  
Enterprise Systems Supervisor  
GSD&M Idea City

Knowing that large file transfer is a critical need for all creative companies, Idea City teamed with other companies in the Omnicom network to outline their requirements and conduct a search for a solution. LaRose and his team created a spreadsheet to track criteria according to weighted scores for a file transfer solution. Among the most important criteria were the following:

- Stability of the vendor company, product maturity and list of current clients
- Product specifications, including the platform, the hardware requirements and the storage capability
- Cost, including acquisition, maintenance and annual cost per user
- Compatibility with Macs, PCs, and a variety of browsers
- Scalability and the size of files that can be handled

- Ease of administration
- Ease of use, including user interface and integration with directory services and enterprise email systems
- Customization and the ability to brand the look and feel of the application

Another consideration was the growing importance of virtualization in the Idea City data center. "As our company grew, our data center was growing and we were running out of space," says LaRose. "Our cooling and power requirements were getting out of hand. We made the strategic direction to run a virtual environment." Thus, it became important to find an enterprise file transfer solution that could run as a virtual application.

## Solution

The choice came down to two market-leading products, which were compared side by side using the weighted spreadsheet. By a wide margin, the Accellion Secure File Transfer Virtual Appliance led the comparison from both a business and a technology point of view.

The Accellion solution met all the business requirements for easily transferring exceptionally large files within and outside of the company. "Now that we have the Accellion solution, we can quickly send our creative works to clients to collaborate on their projects," says LaRose. "The turnaround time for our work is so much faster now because the file transfer takes only minutes, compared to overnight when we used a courier service." Best of all, outside partners and clients can use the same tool to send files back to Idea City staff. "We are customizing the Accellion web interface with the Idea City brand. Our clients see it as an extension of our personal service in the way we work with them," says LaRose.

From a technology viewpoint, the Accellion virtual appliance fit perfectly with Idea City's IT strategic direction, including server consolidation and virtualization. According to LaRose, "We currently run more than 60% of our systems in a VMWare virtual server farm. Ideally, we'd like all new application purchases to work in this virtual environment. We're delighted that the Accellion appliance fits perfectly into this strategy."

Prior to rolling out the Accellion solution to the entire organization, Idea City ran a small pilot program with a number of employees who had experienced file transfer problems with the home grown application. "These folks had problems uploading their files with the old system," says LaRose. "The application would fail when dealing with large files. We asked them to test the Accellion product and the feedback was very positive: 'It works, and it's easy to use.' That was very encouraging to us."

For example, the Print Production Department sends files daily to vendors in order to make publication and printing deadlines. Since this department is under constant pressure to send material, file transfer is an integral part of this group's requirements. According to Diane Patrick, Senior VP and Director of Print Services, "The Print Production Department uses our file transfer application on a daily basis to get files out to our vendors and make production and/or printing deadlines. We

couldn't get along without it. We are extremely happy to see larger file sizes being able to transfer more quickly."

The Accellion file transfer appliance has several features that set the benchmark for Idea City of how their solution should work. "We found the virtual appliance to be extremely easy to deploy. We downloaded the software and were up and running with a nearly perfect configuration in just a few hours," says LaRose. He adds, "The fact that this product comes in a virtual appliance made it easy for us to bring it in-house. We would have had a harder time making the purchase decision if it didn't fit our virtualization strategy."

Another plus is the solution's ease of use and fail safe capabilities. "The user interface is very clean and easy to use," says LaRose. "Also, it's capable of handling whatever we throw at it." Leery of the failure rate of the old home grown solution, LaRose says they tested the resiliency of the Accellion solution by uploading 20 GB files and rebooting the system right in the middle of the file transfer. "The resume process worked just fine. We didn't lose a bit of data and didn't have to start over."

### BENEFITS

- Enhanced collaboration between clients, vendors and staff
- Reduced IT administration and help desk support
- Reduced costs for courier and overnight shipping services
- Virtual appliance that fits into a VMWare IT infrastructure.

## Specifications

GSD&M Idea City	
Deployed since	December 2007
# of Appliances	1
Location of Appliances	Austin, TX
# of Internal and External Users	300 Internal 1000 External
LDAP/AD directory integration	Yes
Custom Web Interface	Yes
Email Integration	No